

## Recovering the past for resilient communities: territorial identity, cultural landscape and symbolic places in Năsăud town, Romania

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# Recovering the past for resilient communities. Territorial identity, cultural landscape and symbolic places in Năsăud town, Romania

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## Abstract

By exploring inhabitants' perceptions of territorial identity in the Land of Năsăud (partly overlapping the former Military Frontier District of Năsăud), Romania, and the present practices building symbolic places, cultural landscapes, community spirit and togetherness in Năsăud town, its polarising centre, we discuss the relevance of recovering the past for building a resilient community. For collecting research data on locals' perceptions, we administered a questionnaire survey and employed a qualitative analysis of the information, while on place symbols, and events organised related to the Military Frontier District history and heritage, we collected data from the local mass media and through field trips investigating the cultural landscape. Our findings include facts and locals' perceptions about their history, features of their community (discourse and symbolic places), the most recent local initiatives and events re-creating a landscape of feeling. Despite running the risk of romanticising a place and a period, one cannot ignore the impact of shaping a certain cultural landscape and discourse on community's self-defining process and future prospects. The roles of culture and community spirit are very strong in empowering and building the confidence of the communities in the present Land of Năsăud, as proved by the perceptions, initiatives, and events in the town of Năsăud.

*Năsăud town; symbolic landscape; Military Frontier District; community; locals' perceptions; memory*

## Zusammenfassung

**Das Wiederherstellen der Vergangenheit zum Aufbau resilienter Gemeinschaften. Territoriale Identität, Kulturlandschaft und symbolische Orte in der Stadt Năsăud (Rumänien)**

Bei der Untersuchung der Wahrnehmungen der Bewohner zur territorialen Identität im Land Năsăud (Rumänien) (teilweise überlappend mit dem ehemaligen Militärgrenzbezirk Năsăud), und der gegenwärtigen Praxis des Aufbaus symbolischer Orte, von Kulturlandschaften, Gemeinschaftsgeist und Zusammengehörigkeit in der Stadt Năsăud, seinem polarisierenden Zentrum, sprechen wir über die Bedeutung des Wiedergewinns der Vergangenheit zum Aufbau einer anpassungsfähigen, belastbaren Gemeinschaft. Zur Erhebung von Forschungsdaten über die Wahrnehmungen der Einheimischen haben wir eine Umfrage durchgeführt und eine qualitative Analyse der Informationen vorgenommen, während wir bei Ortssymbolen und Veranstaltungen, die sich auf die Geschichte und die Vergangenheit des militärischen Grenzbezirks beziehen, Daten aus den lokalen Massenmedien erhoben und bei Exkursionen die Kulturlandschaft untersucht haben. Unsere Befunde umfassen Fakten und Wahrnehmungen der Einheimischen über ihre Geschichte, Merkmale ihrer Gemeinschaft (Diskurs und symbolische Orte), die jüngsten lokalen Initiativen und Veranstaltungen zur Wiederherstellung einer Gefühlslandschaft. Obwohl die Gefahr besteht, Orte und alte Zeiten zu romantisieren, kann man die Auswirkungen der Gestaltung einer bestimmten Kulturlandschaft und der Diskussion auf den Selbstbestimmungsprozess und die Zukunftsperspektiven der Gemeinschaft nicht ignorieren. Die Rolle, die die Kultur und der Gemeinschaftsgeist für die Stärkung der Identität und den Aufbau von Vertrauen der Gemeinschaften im heutigen Land Năsăud spielen, ist sehr bedeutend. Dies zeigen die Eindrücke, Initiativen und Veranstaltungen in der Stadt Năsăud.

*Năsăud Stadt; symbolische Landschaft; militärischer Grenzbezirk; Gemeinde; Wahrnehmungen der Einheimischen; Erinnerung*

## Introduction

The aim of our paper is to explore (a) the perceptions of territorial identity in the Land of Năsăud, Romania, which is partly overlapping the former Military Frontier District of Năsăud (1762-1851), part of the Austrian Military Frontier, and (b) the present practices building symbolic places, cultural landscapes, community spirit and togetherness in Năsăud town, the polarising centre. The most significant period for the social and economic development of this region: the Military Frontier District of Năsăud traces back the present features of the community culture and landscape. In doing so, we discuss the relevance of territorial identity, of recovering the past through the cultural landscape and symbolic places of Năsăud, to build a resilient community.

Situated in the northern part of Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania, the Land of Năsăud has over 100,000 inhabitants, out of which 80 % live in the rural area (ILOVAN 2009). Năsăud, the main economic and cultural centre, is a small town, having just over 9,000 inhabitants.

## Theoretical background

The topic of community spirit and territorial cohesion in today's literature review is rooted in the critical debate about the core idea of territorial identity (ILOVAN et al. 2016a). As such, the ongoing most up-to-date and original research increasingly focuses on the representation of territorial identity seen as a "collective memory" of the common territory, as a progressive change in symbolic boundaries between local and regional communities, with a special reference to social identity. Thus, the territory itself aims at creating particular symbolic spaces (historic "homelands") which emerge from the community interconnectedness with the territory as a polyphonic choir, a collective dance, while being engaged in mutual learning to modify the cultural landscape(s) into so-called 'memoryscapes' (BICKFORD 2005, p. 96) as a matter of cultural heritage.

Beyond all these, Kinsley designed to shift and unsettle the understanding of this symbolic landscape adaptation and

environmental change by considering "landscapes as spaces rendered distinct through an accumulation and concretisation of memory, in situ" (KINSLEY 2015, p. 167) as the landscape continues to change in the future.

There is a living connection between the territory and the community, a symbiosis, as an elasticised sense of time is embedded in the territory. The concept of 'cultural memory' as a source of this interpretative framework enables certain processes and types of rationality when planning space, according to a certain community-owned knowledge along history. The fact that working with memory means also to recognise what is happening now in the territory – new ways of taking care of the territory, uses of space – the quality of places, where differences are visible, enhanced, and underline identity through certain 'identity markers' (MELNYCHUCK et al. 2014, p. 159) in the landscape, argues for its relevance. Researchers discuss the role of these markers, seen as essential symbolic elements interlinked to the community's past, by employing and re-engaging with this past to construct territorial identity in a still in progress future (SIMON et al. 2010, p. 411).

All these show that the basic mechanism of employing history in collective and territorial identity development leads to self-organised and self-governed collective intervention of the territorial identity theory, highly relevant to territorial collaborative governance, which renders the capacity to unveil the regional self-consciousness in terms of cultural reflexivity. Therefore, the go-off of a self-governance process of territorial development takes into consideration the acknowledgment of a solid trans-territorial identity.

Some theorists and identity scholars have examined territorial identity as a factor of aggregation of territorial community, thus enabling contextual insights on the significance of strategic governance which might serve to reinforce local and regional identities and restore a new 'sense of place' and belongingness. Within this framework, a sense of belonging,

social recognition and depiction of a 'collective self' conveys the social expression of territorial identity. As a reaction to calls for a non-representational method of investigating this territorial identity, the distinction between 'internal' self and 'external' landscape in a way that exceeds the (re)formation vision-oriented attributes of landscape must be drawn.

In this respect, Storey found this type of identity as a "complex, fluid, multi-dimensional, multilayered, and processual concept" (STOREY 2012, p. 11). In his study, he underscored the regional symbolic value of identity as having physical and cultural properties. Firstly, the geographical identity behaves as a cognitive product: the outcome of an analytical method and representation that enables us to gain a symbolic control on a given space. Secondly, the territorial identity stems from a self-referential process performed by a community that culturally owns a pre-established symbolic landscape. Consequently, the territorial identity represents the local community by collective identification. In other words, this way of regarding identity as a territorial resource that is instantly able to determine local development allows reinforcing territorial identity and assigning it a role in local development strategies.

Equally, as argued above through this interpretative path, the territorial identity carries two key attributes: it coincides with the effect of an interactive mechanism in which identity plays the role of cause and effect of territorial dynamics. As a result, identity can run an interactive, collective shifting and change the territory according to its self-referential mechanisms, thus establishing a synergic connection with other territorial entities.

Besides this, as more in-depth analyses and case studies on territorial identity showed, historical narratives (VERHAEGE 2014) and collective memory constantly employ the development of the emotional connection to territorial identity and community resilience as a precondition of its spread in the culturally institutionalized displaced heritage of a local or regional community (TERLOUW 2017, p. 33).

Further, in her study, Ting-Toomey reinforced the sense of identity (re)negotiation, as an expression of a highly variable socio-cultural product based on constant territorial interaction. Her strong argument was that in a fast multicultural identity formation society, this sense of inter-cultural identity satisfaction “means the heightened awareness and responsiveness of self-identity and other-identity issues in a cultural situation” (TING-TOOMEY 2015, p. 8).

By outlining the “emergence of European membership norms”, Thomas “interprets the social construction of regions in terms of identity” and develops an “alternative approach focused on the role of membership norms in discursive processes of regional community building” (THOMAS 2017, p. 218). Furthermore, in the same survey, he grasps regional identity as a factual basic process of extending or limiting a regional community in terms of exclusive/inclusive identities. As a result, the inclusive/exclusive aspect of identity must be adapted to empirical analyses on frontiers as “important spaces, where questions of identity, belonging, political conflict, and societal transformation are discussed and acted out” (CASAGLIA & LAINE 2017b, p. 94). For a better interpretation, CASAGLIA and LAINE also suggested a “critical understanding of frontiers as resources and as potential elements of political innovation” (CASAGLIA & LAINE 2017a, p. 3).

Dealing with regional identity, RIDANPÄÄ examined how the questions of spatiality, social memories, local identities and otherness are embedded into one’s own self-identity, by which “regional identities are socially constructed and mediated into people’s regional consciousness by diverting the ways regions are socially remembered, shared and narrated” (RIDANPÄÄ 2014, p. 713).

Additionally, the issue approach of BRIGEVICH proposes “this focus on the region as a level of governance, defined by administrative functions and delineated territorially, has cast regional identity in a political light. Regions as imagined communities require citizens to relate

to people whom they only know from second-hand experiences. To make these ‘imagined communities’ meaningful spaces for collective action, regional elites are constantly engaged in a process of region-building that defines the character of that region and prescribes the norms of in-group/out-group relations” (BRIGEVICH 2016, p. 484).

Moreover, in a compelling argument, PAASI and METZGER (re)conceptualised region as a social construct of the regionalisation processes with a significant focus on the link between history and the region, in terms of a ‘fixed entity or neutral background’ (PAASI & METZGER 2017, p. 22), under the label of ‘relational region’ (p. 25) endowed with a ‘regional identity’ (p. 27).

Lastly, the territorial identity closely connects to culture, a very polysemic concept. From economic, social, and environmental perspectives, the contribution of culture to development in rural and urban areas is taking into account the sustainability and long-term sectoral policies (BAYLISS 2004; SKREDE 2016). In this context, culture is “continually evolving, as well as something rooted, fixed and place-bound” (HUGGINS & THOMPSON 2015, p. 134, apud SYSSNER 2009). Therefore, the concept of culture outlines that of community, in an attempt of defining community culture, which “refers to the overarching or dominant mindsets that underlie the way in which places function in a broader societal sense” (HUGGINS & THOMPSON 2015, p. 135).

Considering all these approaches, we discussed the regional identity building during and since the Military Frontier District of Năsăud and the present perceptions of community identity, as well as the practices in the town of Năsăud, the polarising centre.

### Material and method

We collected data during a three years (2005, 2006, and 2007) questionnaire survey and employed a qualitative analysis of the information. The aim of the survey was to identify the main identity features of Năsăud region and of its

regional community as perceived by its inhabitants. We used discourse analysis to analyse and interpret those data. More than half of those we contacted answered our invitation to participate in the survey: 54 respondents (32 men and 22 women).

We also aimed to ensure a representativeness of the sample by underlining respondents’ certain common view we identified while doing our research. The criteria of sample representativeness related to respondents’ community from a social and cultural perspective: most respondents were teachers and priests, people who knew the traditions and traditional way of life, values, and mentality. Most of them had university education (the high difficulty of half the questions that required an elaborated answer also conditioned the features of the sample). Another criterion for selecting respondents was their origin: we selected people who lived in the region and a few who came in frequent and close contact to the people of the region. Respondents remained anonymous and agreed that we used their answers as research material. Despite the fact that fieldwork dates back about a decade, its results are relevant also for the present and therefore valuable because people’s mentality and perceptions change over longer periods.

For the part on the present discourse on territorial identity, on place symbols, and events organised related to the Military Frontier District history and heritage, we collected data from the local mass media (newspapers and cultural journals – the inhabitants’ main information source) and we took photos of landscapes and of symbolic places in the town of Năsăud. This part of data collection lasted for four months (September-December 2017).

### Their history: facts and perceptions

The Austrian Military Frontier stretched for 1,800 km. It followed the eastern and south-eastern frontier between the Austrian and the Ottoman Empires (Fig. 1). Its establishment took place during the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Austrian Empire underwent a process of reinforcing and



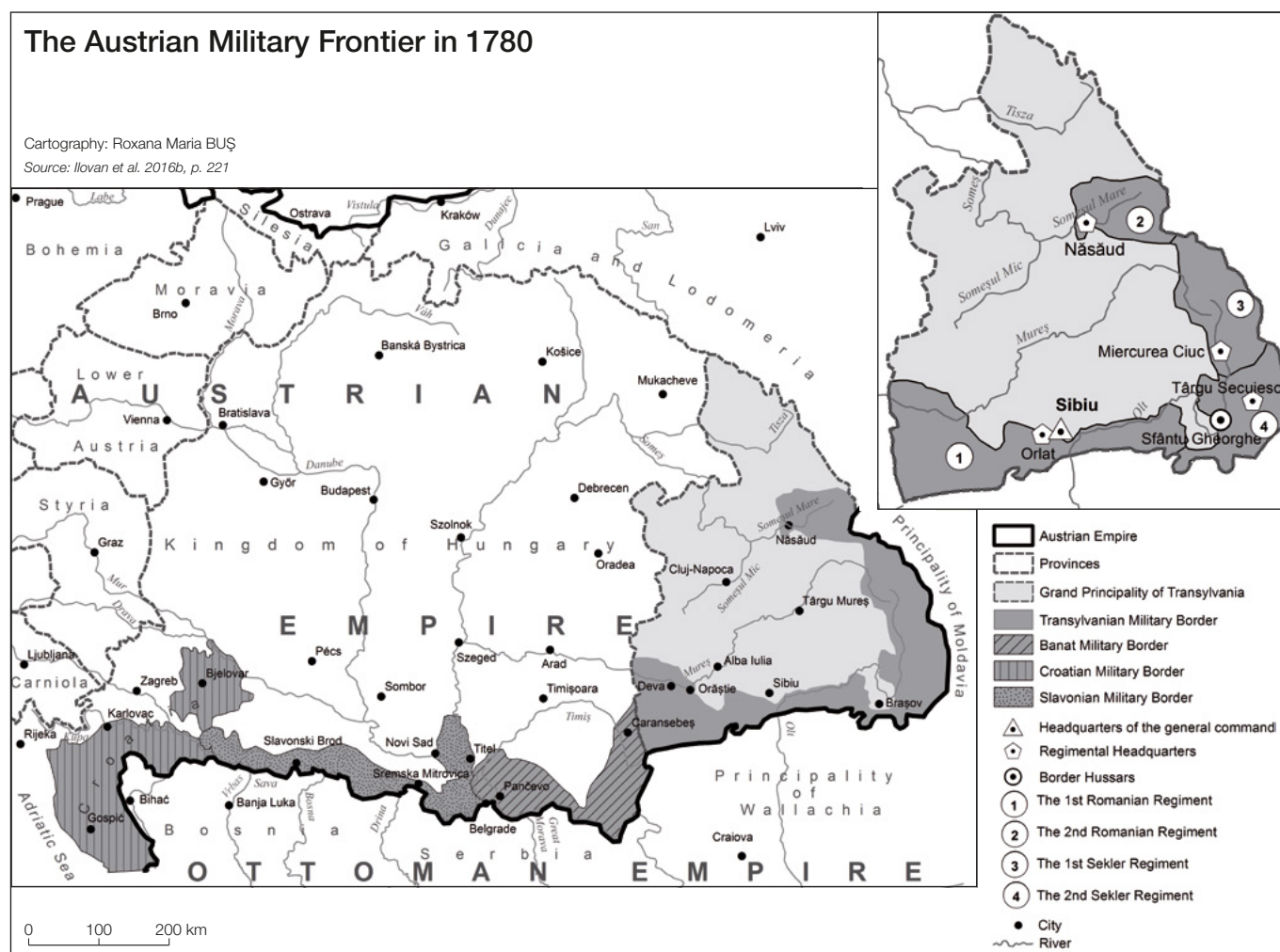


Fig. 1: The Austrian Military Frontier in 1780

protecting its frontiers (EMBER 1989). Within the Transylvanian Military Frontier (*Siebenbürgische Grenze*) (1764-1851), the administration relied on the local people, thus creating a population of farmers and soldiers (GÖLLNER 1974; VANÍČEK 1875; ZACHAR 2004). The 11<sup>th</sup> Romanian Frontier Regiment, part of this defensive belt, set up on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1762, with the name of the Second Wallachian/Romanian Regiment. It included the present area of the Land of Năsăud (Fig. 2).

The reasons for setting up the military frontier in the northeast of Transylvania, and in the area of Năsăud respectively, were to protect and strengthen the frontiers, and to strengthen the economic, military, and religious positions of the Austrian Monarchy in the eastern part of their Empire. This was possible with the local population's support, and thus the

Austrian rule was interested in educating them and in increasing their trust in the monarchy. Therefore, the Romanian population had some advantages and gained privileges from being members of the Military Frontier such as land, education, and religious rights, all these having both a social and psychological impact. As such, the Austrian administration answered to the instability in the area of Năsăud, caused by the ongoing fights between the locals and the magistrate of Bistrița, who was the local administration ruler (VLAȘIN 2011, p. 86).

The Military Frontier District mentality is characterised by certain features such as the worship of heroes, of the Good Emperor, a strong sense of property over land, and observing the rights due to the free men statute. Worshipping heroes in this region occurred after the inhabitants participated at wars as soldiers of the

Austrian Empire: the war against Prussia, and the wars against the Ottomans (1788-1791), the ones against the French (1793-1801, 1805, 1809, 1812, and 1813-1814), etc. (ILOVAN 2009, p. 85). Archive documents (KLEIN 2006, p. 57) include assertions such as: "The inhabitants of the Romanian Military Frontier Districts distinguished themselves in all wars through courage, boldness, endurance, cold blood and bravery, beautiful qualities acknowledged by the great army leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Emperor Napoleon I and the Archduke Carol".

The family was one of the main community values in Năsăud Military Frontier District. This led to the setting up of new Regulations in 1766 on the organisation, concession and the inheritance of property in the Military Frontier District families, and, in 1808, an Order on the property right in the region of Năsăud

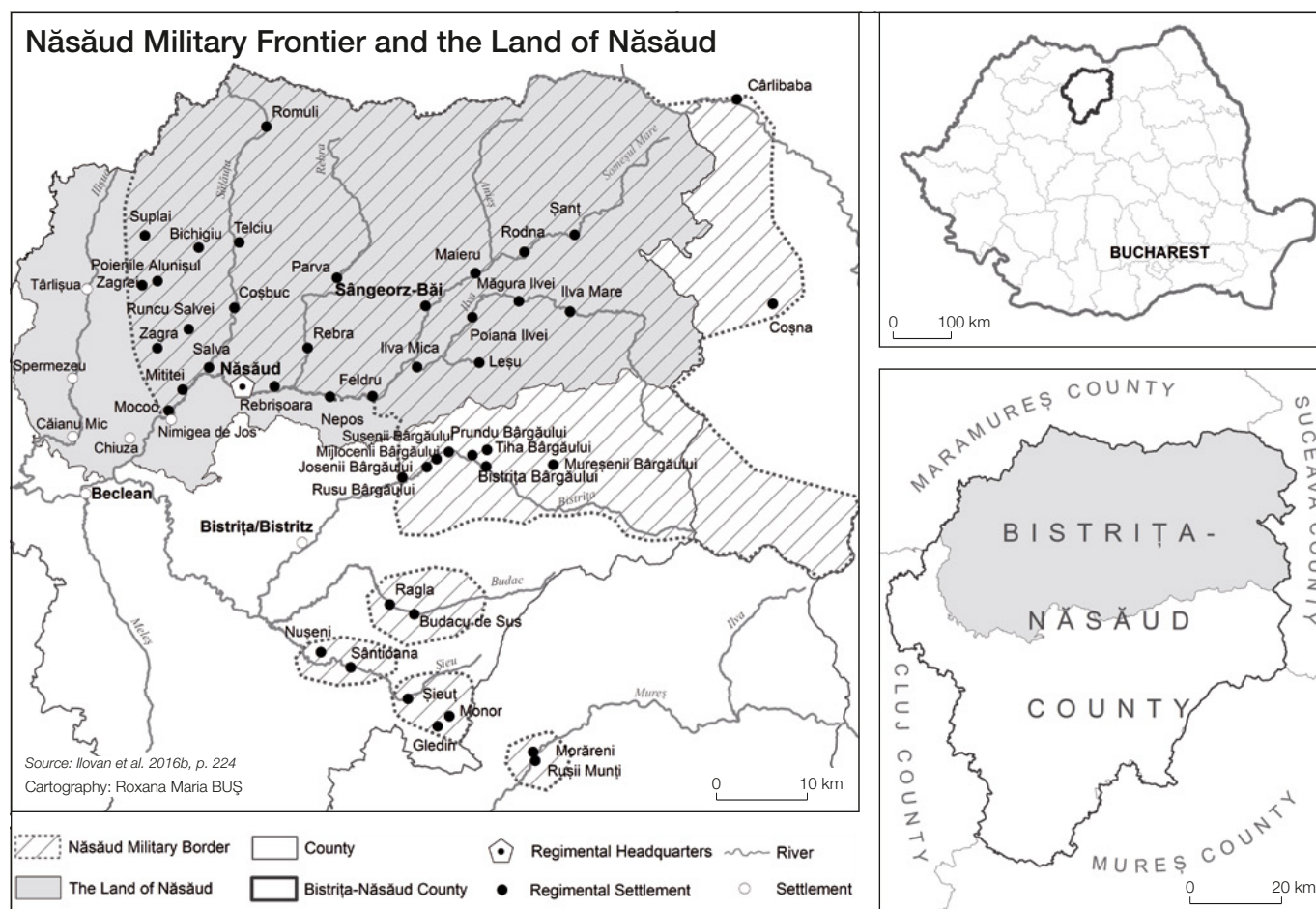


Fig. 2: Năsăud Military Frontier and the Land of Năsăud

was issued (VLAȘIN 2012, p. 11-12). The first land systems organised during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are still taken into account for present real estate issues.

### Their community: discourse and symbolic places

Respondents' perceptions highlighted several topics in the discourse on territorial identity. Their regional identity mainly relates to their land, education, and faith going back to the Military Frontier District period; their Năsăud – "the Academicians' town"; their traditions and traditional costume (with the original element: the hat with peacock feathers); their regional pride; their mentality, behaviour, and shortcomings. Then, we listed and discussed the most significant and recent local initiatives and events creating symbolic places and re-creating a landscape of feeling.

### Our land, our education, and our faith

The well functioning of the frontier was based on the care for and achievement of a frontier guard identity, which meant a new and more disciplined life style, shared values, while undergoing a series of very impactful military, economic, social, educational, confessional territorial planning initiatives (ILOVAN 2008; JORDAN 2015; SABĂU 2015).

The Romanian population in Northern Transylvania perceived that period as a glorious one because they gained certain political rights, economic welfare and had positive social mobility. Therefore, the identity of the present Land of Năsăud derives from both "land" features (long ethnographical tradition, Romanian language and Orthodox religion, heritage region) and military frontier under new and advantageous political, social, and economic conditions (ILOVAN 2009). These characteristics are also perceived

by the inhabitants of Năsăud town or by those knowing the town and its region. They rendered in the cultural landscapes and in the symbolic places (most of them in Năsăud town, the polarising centre) and the settlement to which all inhabitants of the Land of Năsăud and of the Military Frontier District related or relate to (this is still true for the settlements on the Someșul Mare Valley and its tributaries).

"The consciousness of belonging to the 'Năsăud frontier' is one of people's fundamental features from which, unfortunately, *only rights* come first! They emphasize the past as a period with high social, economic, and especially cultural achievements." (43 years old archiver – from outside the region)

Respondents identified the property right over the land and inhabitants'

emancipation through School and Church as the main achievements of the Military Frontier District period. The School and Church had marked their becoming both as a community and individually. Worshiping the land governed human and social relations in the traditional rural communities of the Military Frontier District, as well as in the small town of Năsăud.

“Worshipping the land, property in general, the attachment towards the Church and school.” (50 years old university professor)

**Our Năsăud – “the Academicians’ town”**  
Emancipation through education marked the development of both the town and the region.

“The imprint left by the militarisation of the region, a place of culture and intellectuality ....” (34 years old teacher)

or

“Military, administrative and cultural capital of the Someș Valley, a breeding place for great cultural values: over 100 PhD owners, over 50 university professors, 18 members of the Romanian Academy who went to school in Năsăud.” (59 years old teacher)

After 1851, education was supported through the funds that had initially a military destination. These were transformed into civil ones (the agreement of 1861-1862) that supported the schools in the regions and provided bursaries to pupils and university students descending from military frontier people until 1918 (URECHE 2001, p. 13).

“I underline two determining factors for what Năsăud has become:  
1. The power of sacrifice for the community – Tănase Tudoran, martyr for social justice and Orthodoxy. And accepting the Agreement and voting the Foundational Instrument

through which the military frontier families renounced to their financial rights in favour of creating the School Central Fund and the Bursary Fund. Up to 1948, over 4,000 pupils, university, and PhD students benefited from these. These also funded entirely the Military Frontier High School, the communal schools and all the other schools in the region until 1923.

2. The educational policy and that of teachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (imposed especially by the Vicar Grigore Moisil) on:

- selecting the best pupils from all military frontier villages and funding their high school (in Blaj and Năsăud), university (in Vienna, Graz, Rome, Lvov, Berlin, Prague, and Budapest), and PhD studies;

- signing contracts with the bursary PhD students to return as specialists to the Năsăud Military Frontier region;

- stimulating the teachers to remain in the schools of the region and this led to the occurrence of highly competitive teaching teams (those with PhD: Paul Tanco, Artemius Publiu Alexi, Constantin Moisil senior, Ion Mălai and others between 1865 and 1900), including the 15 academicians from the current 18.” (59 years old teacher)

### **Our hat with peacock feathers**

Some respondents considered that the characteristic features of the traditional costumes in the Land of Năsăud related to the military frontier period.

“The hat with peacock feathers, a unique element, although not representative to the entire military frontier area, has become emblematic.” (38 years old priest, journalist, and speleologist – from outside the region, but living there at present)

### **Our regional pride**

Respondents considered that the people in the region had two main reasons

to be proud of: the progress enabled by the military frontier period (reflected in a good organisation of their community and life – mainly of economy and social issues, among which education was always a priority) and a secular competition among the component settlements of the region or among the inhabitants themselves. Still, irrespective of their age and education, most of the respondents identified the Military Frontier District as a source of assuming their superiority (ILOVAN et al., 2016b, p. 231-235).

“‘The Năsăud pride’ is the feeling of these people from the former Second Military Frontier Regiment (the 22 communes on the Someșul Mare Valley and on the valleys that flow into the Someș) of having the past of free men, open to culture and that gave 20 academicians.” (65 years old retired teacher)

and

“The inhabitants of the town, most of them farmers, with individual households (although they kept the pace with modernity) are very fond of their assets (animals, pieces of land, and even money). Their favourite posture: their hand on belt in order to show everyone that they are in control. The intellectual boast with the academicians.” (58 years old retired teacher)

They did not defend only the Imperial frontiers and interests, but they also defended their identity that they had created before the establishment of the military frontier. The military frontier people (known for their loyalty to authorities and their heroic deeds) added new elements on an old identity, characterised by identity markers such as “language, religion, costumes, traditional occupations and traditions connected to the most significant moments in the people’s life and in that of the community” (ILOVAN et al. 2016b, p. 233).



"I explain 'the Năsăud pride' through their great love for tradition, for their ancestors, pride of being the military frontier people's descendants, keepers and defenders of the Romanian language, of the traditional costumes, of traditions and handicrafts left from immemorial times." (34 years old primary school teacher)

or

"Being an inhabitant of the Land of Năsăud is a pride and a privilege because this region is well positioned geographically and it is in a wonderful spiritual and folkloric heritage place." (48 years old entrepreneur)

or

"Assuming the regional pride." (53 years old priest)

### **Our mentality, behaviour, and shortcomings**

Having freedom as their supreme value that significantly influenced their existence and self-defining, respondents considered their history and cultural heritage as the factors that modelled the locals' behaviour.

"Their mentality generates a type of behaviour originating in the years of Austrian leadership, and the fact that they were free could explain their 'boastfulness'." (57 years old teacher)

The inhabitants of Năsăud and of its region are faithful people.

"They are proud people, who believe in God and in His power, with a mentality open to everything new and beautiful." (29 years old primary school teacher)

or

"The Church has also an important role in solving the community

problems and people have still remained united around this institution." (48 years old entrepreneur)

The respondents themselves identified ways of promoting their community identity through their cultural heritage.

"I think that, for the past generations, preserving and retaining all that was valuable was a high moral duty, passed from father to son, but which, unfortunately, has obviously been diminishing to the present day. It is the duty of the Church, of the School and of other institutions (i.e. cultural house, museum, etc.) to perpetuate and preserve this heritage through exhibitions, symposia, festivals, school festivities and activities, etc." (59 years old priest)

or

"The Land of Năsăud has specific traditions and customs that we wish to preserve." (54 years old teacher)

### **Memory places, local initiatives and events creating symbolic places and re-creating a landscape of feeling**

In small towns, the different competing or conflicting interests for using space are not as visible as in big cities. Still, space cannot be inclusive for all, there is always a natural exclusion, but small communities create inclusiveness and social cohesion to a higher degree (HUGGINS & THOMPSON 2015, p. 142-150). In addition, the institutional support for cultural activities leads to community cohesion and resilience, as "[c]ulture helps us to adapt to change by anchoring our sense of being; it shows that we come from somewhere and have a story to tell; it can provide us with confidence and security to face the future" (SKREDE 2016, p. 414, apud LANDRY 2008, p. 39).

In Năsăud town, cultural local and regional initiatives have support from the public administration, which is interested thus in strengthening people's cultural identity and community pride. We

researched the way in which the community's involvement constructed today's Năsăud territorial identity.

### **a. ASTRA Association**

A very important association – ASTRA (Asociația Transilvană pentru Literatura Română și Cultura Poporului Român [The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People]) – with a branch located in Năsăud town, keeps alive the traditions, customs and the cultural values of this settlement and of the ones within its cultural influence area. It cooperates to a series of projects (e.g. book presentations, art exhibitions, homages to the Năsăud military frontier people, etc.) with "Liviu Rebreanu" Cultural House in Năsăud.

In addition, ASTRA is the most actively involved into promoting the identity of Năsăud as a cultural town (also announcing inhabitants through a billboard in the town centre, nearby the biggest church – Fig. 3). Other active actors are the Năsăud Military Frontier Museum and the schools, especially "George Coșbuc" National College. The events initiated through the cooperation of these institutions, associations, organisations, etc. enhance people's sense of belonging to a community that is part of something bigger (i.e. the Romanian nation, the Romanian culture, and the Romanian history).

People feel the need to be part of something bigger, thus resulting in a symbolic territory appropriation. The production of the territory has a creative dimension and expression, not only normative forms, and this process is well captured in the following quotation, from a newspaper article, where two representatives of ASTRA cultural association make several proposals for building and establishing certain monuments in the town. Reminding the inhabitants of their roots, this association wants to contribute to creating a place identity by means of using memory as a core identity. Memory triggers are very important for the present and future of this community, as both present and future generations will inherit the territory embedded with time. Cooperation





Fig. 3: Billboard used by ASTRA to promote its cultural initiatives (Alexandra-Maria Colcer 2017)

between the public authorities and the inhabitants decided the place of monuments in the public space. Below is the phase of consultation (PLEȘ & SENI 2013):

“On behalf of the elected representatives and local councillors’ invitation sent on 13-14 July, the current year, by *Răsunetul* Newspaper, regarding the Town Monuments, as well as on behalf of ASTRA members, we also make known their opinion upon it: A. The Memorial Monument to the Frontier Guards of Năsăud should be established in its previous headquarters, in the yard of the Military Frontier Museum respectively; B. The Memorial Monument to the martyrs of Năsăud can be established in the surroundings belonging to any Orthodox Church in the town, even if they originate from different spots, but still belong to the Land

of Năsăud; C. The Memorial Monument to the academicians of Năsăud should be established in the Central Park of the town, thus aesthetically integrating the metal tower [*this no longer exists, our note*]. • A designer can also use the metal tower around which a rotunda to be built to host these Academicians’ Gallery (the economic and cheaper model). • The tower has a quality: it keeps the height of the surrounding buildings, so a metal spiral can be made around it up to the Academicians’ Gallery while the tourists can go down by using other stairs (which would surely turn into a place to visit). Even if it is being demolished, another building must be established in its place to preserve the scale of the surrounding edifices, leaving academicians on TOP, at the upper level of the edifice, as THEY brought Năsăud to the fore; • The

Academicians’ Gallery made by “George Coșbuc” National College will include only the graduates of this institution, while the Academicians’ Gallery made by the locals will include them all, that is, even those who graduated from other Năsăud Schools (The Normal School...) or who originate from Năsăud or the Land of Năsăud [...]; • The idea of an alley in the town park consisting of the academicians’ busts statues is auspicious, which can be made during a whole summer by carrying out a sculpture camp where as many sculptors from the county, country or the Romanian Diaspora could work there [...]”.

In 2015, “Liviu Rebreanu” Cultural House in Năsăud inaugurated the Academicians’ Gallery (with their 21 drawn portraits). Another project is *The Cultural Café* in the foyer of the Cultural House.





Fig. 4: The Military Frontier Museum (Alexandra-Maria Colcer 2017)



Fig. 5: The Roman Catholic Church, 1762 (Alexandra-Maria Colcer 2017)



Fig. 6: "George Coșbuc" National College (Alexandra-Maria Colcer 2017)



Fig. 7: Captain Alexandru Bohățel, education supporter (Alexandra-Maria Colcer, 2017)

Thus, the locals perceive and present the territory as an open book with signs that recalled the belonging. They use a collective language when creating the symbolic places in the town and in this manner building their landscapes of memory and feeling. This defines a community production of space.

The urban area of Năsăud hosts many *memory places* related to the Military

Frontier as a glorious historical period or having impact on the development of the town as a cultural centre and an education provider, thus shaping particular markers significant for the inhabitants' collective memory. Such memory places are the Military Frontier Museum (Fig. 4), the Roman Catholic Church (Fig. 5), "Liviu Rebreanu" House of Culture hosting the

Academics' Gallery, "George Coșbuc" National College (Fig. 6), Captain Alexandru Bohățel's bust statue – ruler of the Autonomous Romanian District of Năsăud, after the Military Frontier District was abolished, and supporter of funding the Romanian schools in Năsăud (Fig. 7), and the Heroes' Monument (Fig. 8) in the Central Park (within the Union Square).





Fig. 8: The Heroes' Monument in the Central Park (within the Union Square) (Alexandra-Maria Colcer 2017)

#### **b. Năsăud Military Frontier Museum**

The Năsăud Military Frontier Museum (Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean) (18<sup>th</sup> century Austrian Barracks maintained in an impeccable state) hosts numerous exhibitions and conferences (Fig. 4).

#### **c. The Roman Catholic Church**

The Roman Catholic Church (Fig. 5) has a symbolic value as it reminds of Joseph II's visit (he visited it in June 1773, after being mentioned in documents starting with 1762, when the Military Frontier was established) and of his naming of four villages from the region. This occurred after he said "Salve Romuli parva nepos!", meaning "I greet you small nephew of Romulus!", due to the similarity of the name of a neighbouring village (Salva) to the Latin word and the Emperor's conviction of the Latin origin that its native name could have had. This Baroque monument is a private property and has

not been listed as a historical monument so far (LUCUȚA 2015).

#### **d. "George Coșbuc" National College**

Starting with 1837, Năsăud hosted courses for training primary school teachers. These courses lasted, with some interruptions, until 1859, when the School for Training Primary School Teachers was set up, which later on became the prestigious "George Coșbuc" National College in Năsăud nowadays (Fig. 6).

This College bore the name of Franz Joseph Military Frontier Gymnasium between 1863 and 1920, being the fourth Romanian College in Transylvania, where anyone could learn there, irrespective of their ethnic or religious belonging (PLEȘ 2016, p. 282-288). The education system was funded by the Military Frontier District Funds (these funds, initially having a military destination, were oriented to supporting the

education system in the town and in the settlements of the former Military Frontier District). This College is a symbol of the community's high investment in education during the Military Frontier District and afterwards (until 1948) (PLEȘ 2017, p. 2-3) (Fig. 7).

#### **e. The Academicians' Town**

Because Năsăud is called the *Academicians' Town*, the Days of the Romanian Academy were marked in Năsăud by celebrating the publication of the retired history teacher Ioan Seni's book (member of ASTRA Năsăud) "The Romanian Academy at 150 years (1866-2016) – The Academicians of Năsăud". Before the event, the participants visited the Academicians' Gallery at "Liviu Rebreanu" Culture House. One of the participants suggested that as at the entrance to Bistrița it was written "Town of the National Anthem", also at the entrance in Năsăud it should

be written “The Academicians’ Town” (LAZĂR 2016).

Another action was that of February 2017, when the “Liviu Rebreanu” House of Culture in Năsăud hosted the foundation of the first literary cenacle in the town, the reporter mentioning the relation between this activity and the heritage of the “Academicians’ Town” in the headline (OLTEAN 2017).

Memory is the source of normative framework, enabling certain processes and a type of rationality when planning space, according to a certain community-owned knowledge. Defining their own town as a cultural one, under the name of the “Academicians’ Town”, the inhabitants of Năsăud use symbols from their history during the Military Frontier period, alongside others, from the local and national culture (e.g. bust statues of poets), but not the purpose of our present analysis.

#### **f. The Heroes’ Monument**

The Central Park is a symbolic place situated in the historical centre of the town and very often used for celebrating or commemorating local and national events, while hosting the Heroes’ Monument (Fig. 8). Among the most recent ones, the following event is the most illustrative: the public military ceremony to commemorate the heroes of the World War I who fought for the regaining of some Romanian territories. On this occasion, the officials read the list with the names of the heroes (300 in total) from the Land of Năsăud (OLTEAN 2016).

#### **g. Place-making through cultural activities**

Activities of “George Coșbuc” National College where the town community and other institutions are involved take place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October as The College Day and the 1<sup>st</sup> of December (Great Union Day), 24<sup>th</sup> of January (Romanian Unification Day also known as ‘Little Union Day’), The Heroes Day, etc.

Activities organised by Năsăud Military Frontier Museum and “George Coșbuc” National College are as follows: *Tracing the Military Frontier People in the Land of*

*Năsăud* (in December 2016), in cooperation with the Faculty of Geography, the department of Bistrița (Bistritz) 2016; participating with the students at the book presentation “And from military frontier guards they made us peasants ...’ Collective Mentalities in the Former Military Frontier Villages of Năsăud Region, during the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” by Claudia Septimia Sabău (on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2016); participating at the scientific event “The Historiography of the Năsăud Military Frontier – Past, Present, Perspectives” (on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2017).

Moreover, being listed in the Guinness World Records, the aim of Năsăud town succeeded in establishing two world records and thus supporting the well-known “Năsăud pride”: one for the highest number of people dressed up in traditional costume and one for the highest number of participants involved in a traditional dance. These events took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, both local and central public authorities being involved in their setting up. Their achievement by the people in the region (almost 10,000 people participated at establishing the world record, while the population of Năsăud town is just over 9,000) was perceived and reported by the local mass media as a historical event, a proof of people’s strong connection with traditional culture and values. 5,000 persons dressed up in traditional costumes participated in 2016, while during the second year event, the Land of Năsăud was perceived and promoted as “the land of the traditional costume” (LĂZĂROI 2017) by one of the popular artists, like Virginia Linul.

Rites and feasts have a symbolic nature, as they reinforce the concept of socialization, by sharing collective references and mutual belongings. Such an opportunity reactivated the memory during the event on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, when the entire community participated at their own production of self-identity. This event was significant from the perspective of how the community members were representing themselves, of how they were recognising themselves. They used a collective language of representativeness, speaking

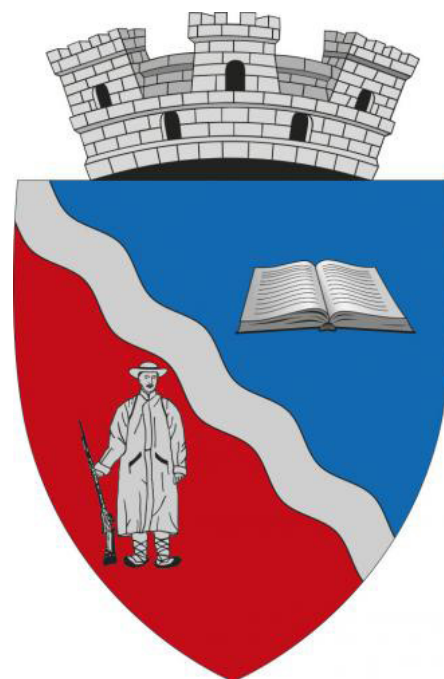


Fig. 9: The new coat of arms of Năsăud town (Guvernul României 2012)

of their folkloric traditions and wearing that hat with peacock feathers (related to the military frontier period).

There are also other great cultural projects taking place in Năsăud each year and aiming to get everyone in the region involved (people and institutions) such as The Days of Năsăud town and The Contest Festival “For Ispas<sup>1</sup> in Năsăud” (“De Ispas la Năsăud”), etc.

Moreover, a festival promoting the regional values and traditional costumes, such as the national festival “Pană de Păun” [Peacock Feather], organised by the Cultural Association “Pană de Păun” Bistrița, continues its activities (BRADEA 2017), although being moved from Năsăud, where it used to take place during the Days of the Town, to Bistrița. For more than 145 years (the oldest cultural celebration in the Land of Năsăud), the May Celebration of the Students in Năsăud continues to be another event taking place annually.

To sum up, this kind of actions that promote the cultural image (MITITEAN 2015) of the Academicians’ town or of

<sup>1</sup> This is the popular name of an Orthodox Feast which celebrates Christ’s Resurrection and marks 40 days after the Easter.



the Austrian Military Frontier are highly frequent in Năsăud. For instance, in 2015, new road signs with the new coat of arms for the town (Fig. 9) (MAXIMINIAN 2015), as approved in 2012 (LUCUȚA 2012), were put up at the three entries, respectively exists from Năsăud town. There is a mention according to which “the book is the evidence of the large number of academicians who studied in Năsăud; the military frontier soldier symbolizes the old Romanian military frontier soldiers from the Land of Năsăud, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the winding belt represents the Someș River; the mural crown with three castellated towers marks the fact that this settlement is a town” in the newspaper’s article on Năsăud town, seen as the “former seat of the Năsăud Military Frontier in the 18<sup>th</sup> century” (LUCUȚA 2012)

## Conclusions

Drawing on the example of Năsăud town, the polarising centre of the Land of Năsăud – a small region in north-eastern Transylvania (Romania) –, we explore the ways in which the local population shapes places of memory and specific activities and traditions during a long process of appropriating its cultural landscape. The main features of this population are its vivid awareness of its history and its consciously preserving the memory of the Habsburg Monarchy military frontier.

The essential results of field research first underlined how the local community perceived their region and town by being able to identify the main features of this community as reflected in their discourse and symbolic places: land, education, and faith; Năsăud – “the Academicians’ town”; the hat with peacock feathers; the regional pride; their mentality, behaviour, and shortcomings. Secondly, our research focused on memory places, local initiatives and events creating symbolic places and re-creating a landscape of feeling. The most important of these were the following: ASTRA Association; Năsăud Military Frontier Museum; The Roman Catholic Church; “George Coșbuc” National College; The

Academicians’ Town; The Heroes’ Monument; and, very important, place-making through cultural activities.

Social cohesion is fundamental in making the urban area and in maintaining its identity and the community spirit. Through such cultural events and various activities that revive the military frontier spirit as well as the old traditions in the region, public institutions, associations and inhabitants work to enable and strengthen the link between past and present, promoting community shared values, regional belonging, and pride.

Due to their specific features, public spaces testify the connection between the territory and the community, where time is part of the territory through creating places of remembrance, of memory. Therefore, in Năsăud, as part of the urban cultural landscape, the public spaces introduce a layered history of the territory.

Despite running the risk of romanticising a place and a period, one cannot ignore the impact of building a specific cultural landscape and discourse on community’s self-defining process and future prospects. The role of culture is valuable in empowering and building the confidence of the communities in the present Land of Năsăud, as testified by the perceptions, initiatives, and events in the town of Năsăud, the polarising centre of the region.

Our research did not explore or discuss whether the ways in which cultural tradition was maintained could be the basis for a cultural tourism offer, but the implementation of which could support the local and regional economy. Therefore, we consider that another survey and research could show whether the population would like to make such an offer at all or whether this interest is limited to its local elite.

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**Резюме**

ОАНА-РАМОНА ИЛОВАН, КРИСТИНА-ДЖОРДЖИАНА ВОЙКУ, АЛЕКСАНДРА-МАРИЯ КОЛЧЕР

**Восстановление событий прошлого для сообществ, подтвердивших свою жизнеспособность. Территориальная идентичность, культурный ландшафт и символические места в городе Нэсэуд, Румыния**

Изучая представления жителей о территориальной идентичности в Земле Нэсэуд (территория которой частично совпадает с территорией бывшего Нэсэудского военного пограничного округа), Румыния, а также существующие практики создания символических мест, культурных ландшафтов, чувства общности и единения в городе Нэсэуд, его поляризационном центре, мы обсуждаем актуальность восстановления событий прошлого для построения жизнеспособного сообщества. Для сбора исследовательских данных о представлениях местных жителей мы провели анкетный опрос и качественный анализ информации, а на символических местах и мероприятиях, связанных с историей и наследием военного пограничного округа, собрали данные из местных средств массовой информации и в ходе экскурсий по культурному ландшафту. Наши выводы включают факты и представления местных жителей об их истории, особенностях их сообщества (дискурс и символические места), самые последние местные инициативы и события, воссоздающие все разнообразие чувств. Несмотря на риск романтизации места и периода, нельзя игнорировать влияние формирования определенного культурного ландшафта и дискурса на процесс самоопределения сообщества и будущие перспективы. Культура и чувство общности играют важную роль в расширении возможностей и укреплении доверия в сообществах современной Земли Нэсэуд, что подтверждается представлениями, инициативами и событиями в городе Нэсэуд.

*Город Нэсэуд; символический пейзаж; военный пограничный округ; сообщество; восприятие местных жителей; память*

**Résumé**

**Reconstituer le passé de communautés solides, d'identités territoriales, de paysages culturels et de lieux symboliques à Năsăud, en Roumanie**

En étudiant la façon dont les habitants perçoivent l'identité territoriale dans la région de Năsăud (qui chevauche partiellement l'ancienne frontière militaire de la région de Năsăud), en Roumanie, et les pratiques de construction actuelles de lieux symboliques, les paysages culturels, l'esprit communautaire et l'unité dans la ville de Năsăud, son centre polarisant, nous voulons aborder le sujet de la pertinence de la reconstitution du passé dans le but de créer une communauté solide. Pour obtenir des données de recherche sur la perception des habitants de la région, nous avons mené une enquête et procédé à une analyse qualitative des informations obtenues. Par ailleurs, dans les lieux symboliques et lors des événements organisés sur le thème de l'histoire et de l'héritage de la frontière militaire de la région, nous avons recueilli des données provenant des médias locaux et des excursions sur le thème du paysage culturel. Nous avons basé nos recherches sur des faits, la façon dont les habitants de la région perçoivent leur histoire, les particularités de leur communauté (discours et lieux symboliques), les dernières initiatives locales et les événements créant un paysage de sentiments. Même s'il existe un risque d'idéaliser un lieu et une période, on ne peut pas ignorer l'influence de certains discours et paysages culturels sur la façon dont une communauté se définit et sur ses perspectives d'avenir. L'esprit culturel et communautaire joue un rôle majeur dans l'émancipation et le renforcement de la confiance des communautés de la région actuelle de Năsăud, comme le prouvent les perceptions, les initiatives et les événements de la ville de Năsăud.

*Năsăud; paysage symbolique; frontière militaire de la région; communauté; perceptions des habitants; mémoire*